

A Brief History of the Senate Page

Clearly identified by their tailored blue uniforms and shiny brass buttons, congressional pages have long decorated the halls of the Capitol. Dating as far back as the 1820's, congressional pages have diligently waited upon our nation's legislators, as a personal attendant. Summoned by a wave, a clap, or a snap of the fingers, these young congressional employees are required to retrieve documents and maintain desk supplies and writing materials for Members of Congress. Over a century and a half later, the job of the page has evolved to better accommodate the ever changing congressional world.

In the nineteenth century pages would be responsible for mixing their Senator's ink and knowing their quill preference. Daily tasks, for an earning of \$1.50, would include cleaning up after Senators who enjoyed whittling in the chamber as they listened to speeches, or removing bats that had flown into the chambers the night before Senate reconvened. Though conditions were still unstable during the antebellum, pages were expected to maintain a professional appearance. Officers tried to enforce a rule that every page was to take two baths a week in one of the marble bath tubs in the Capitol basement. By the late nineteenth century, page's wages increased by \$2.00, although many boys sought ways to make outside money by selling senator's signatures or duplicating floor speeches for a small profit. Early twentieth century pages would race through the halls and committee rooms, announcing an impending vote.

Mid twentieth century, a new age minimum of fourteen years old was established for congressional pages, and as the population of the United States changed its views on many issues, the page program had to change accordingly. The first black page was appointed in 1965, and the first female page in 1971. Technology greatly changed the role of the page, following the installation of the legislative buzzers and signal lights.

Although the political world demands a certain level of maturity, both pages and Senators found times to play jokes on one another. Senators would often demand that a non-existing Senator be found immediately, while pages would hide Senator's canes and coats. To pass time, pages could be found behind the Vice-President's chair playing marbles, or covering a fellow, sleeping page with mucilage or ink spots. Although details of the page's duties have, and will continue to change to better suite the needs of the Senator, the core of their duties will remain unchanged. Senator Robert Byrd, in an address on the History of the U.S. Senate, noted that "although the pages no longer wear knickers, and their duties no longer include chasing bats from our chamber and bringing us whittling sticks, they still have to sit up nights with us...the pages are principally messengers." The page program, though often overlooked or taken for granted, plays a vital role in the legislative process and is inseparable from the history of the U.S. government. Still to this day, a small bit of history remains unchanged while the congressional pages "sit on the steps right and left of the presiding officer's desk, waiting to be summoned for assistance."

TODAY'S Senate Page Program

The United States Senate Page Program is a phenomenal way to integrate school studies, make powerful connections, and earn valuable experience, all while earning a comfortable annual salary of over \$20,000!!! The Page Program is open to all high school juniors, who are either sixteen or seventeen years old upon program acceptance. Students must have maintained a minimum grade point average of 3.0 throughout their high school career. Upon acceptance to the Page Program, students reside at the Senate Page School in Washington, D.C., where academic studies begin promptly at 6:15am and end at 9:45am, when Senate convenes in the Capitol. Throughout the day pages are responsible for preparing the Senate floor for session, delivering correspondence and legislative material within the Congressional Complex, distributing bills and amendments, calling Senator's to the phone, etc.

The Senate Page School, located in the basement of the page's residence at Webster Hall, is an accredited school that offers credit for a traditional high school course load as well as AP classes, where students are eligible to receive college credit. The school year is made up of two semesters, beginning in September and ending in June. Although it would be hard to pass up an opportunity to be surrounded daily by some of the world's most influential figures, many students are unable to participate due to financial reasons. The United States Senate pays each page an annual salary of \$20,491 for their services to the government. Each month \$600 is deducted from the page's pay for living expenses, including housing and two meals a day.

The Senate Page Program affords high school students from Montana a prestigious way to spend junior year and a valuable look at the inner workings of the United States' political system. Please feel free to contact Senator Max Baucus' DC office at 202-224-2651, or the Montana toll free number at 1-800-332-6106. Page applications can also be found on the Baucus Website at http://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/Pages_vrd.htm.

We look forward to hearing from you.